

REMARKS

Claims 1-14 are pending herein. Claims 1, 5 and 8-12 have been amended to correct matters of form only.

Applicants appreciate the Examiner indicating that claims 4-7, 10 and 11 would be allowed if rewritten in independent form. For the reasons explained below, however, it is respectfully submitted that all pending claims are in condition for allowance.

1. The objection to the drawings is noted, but deemed moot in view of the above-outlined amendment to claim 12.

2. Claims 1-3, 8 and 9 were rejected under §102(b) over Sakuma et al., claims 12 and 13 were rejected under §103 over Sakuma, and claim 14 was rejected under §103 over Sakuma in view of the alleged admitted prior art in the specification.

The inventive entity listed in the Sakuma patent is identical to the inventive entity listed in the present application. The present application was filed June 19, 2001, whereas Sakuma issued on July 31, 2001. Accordingly, the Sakuma reference is not prior art to the present application.

In view of the foregoing, applicants respectfully submit that all pending claims in this application are in condition for allowance. Should the Examiner deem that any further action by the applicants would be desirable in placing this application in even better condition for issue, the Examiner is requested to telephone applicants' undersigned representative.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees associated with this communication or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 50-1446.

Respectfully submitted,



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